The Status of Sunnah in Islam

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Introduction

Praise be to Allah, Benediction and Peace be on the Messenger of Allah, his family, his companions, and his adherents. This is a lecture which I delivered in the city of Doha, the capital of Qatar, in the blessed month of Ramadhan 1392 A.H. Some of my friends have suggested to me to publish my lecture on account of need of the Muslims to a work of its kind. In response to their request, I am printing it for general propagation on account of its advantage, having regard for the reminiscences and history. I have added some separate titles to assist the reader to collect the main ideas. I pray to Allah, the Mighty, the Glorious, to write me among those who defend the religion and those who help enact the law; and to reward me for it. Surely he is the most generous in responding to my prayer. Damascus 22 Muharram-al-Haram 1394 A.H.

The Status of Sunnah in Islam **A Declaration that it cannot dispense with The Qur'an**

All Praise be to Allah, we praise Him, seek His help and His forgiveness. We seek refuge in Allah from the evils of our souls and evils of our deeds. One whom Allah guides, none can lead him astray, and one whom He misguides, none can guide him. I bear witness that there is nothing worthy of worship**(1)** except Allah, and I bear witness that Muhammad (SAW) is His servant and His messenger. ***Oh you who believe, Fear Allah Truly, and do not die except as Muslims***. **(S.3 A.102)**. ***O Men fear your Lord who created you from one soul, and created its partner, and from them spread men and women in numbers. Take care, Allah will question you about it and the kinship. Surely, Allah is ever watchful of your deeds*** **(S.4 A.1)**. ***O those who believe. Fear Allah and say what is correct so that it fits you. He will forgive your sins. Whoever obeys Allah and His messenger that is a great achievement*** **(S.33 A.70-71)**. The best of speech is the speech of Allah. That is The Book of Allah. The best of guidance is the guidance of Muhammad. Of all matters, the worst are innovations; and everything new is an innovation, and every innovation is a deviation, and every deviation leads to Hell-fire.

I do not think that I will be able to offer this high ranking assembly - especially when there are distinguished ulama (scholars) and professors present - some knowledge which has not been dealt with before. If what I think is true, I will rest contented that my

address will be a reminder, as it says in the Qur'an: ***Remind, for the reminder would benefit the believers*** (51:55). I do not think that my talk in this blessed month of Ramadhan, the month of importance, is an exposition of something of its merits, rules and their practice, and the like, which generally the preachers and instructors touch on, on account of the benefit they give to the listeners, and procure for them good and blessing;

but I have chosen my talk to be a study of a general nature, surely it is one of the roots of the Shari'ah (Islamic law). It is a declaration of the importance attached to the Sunnah in the Islamic law.

The Role of Sunnah Towards The Qur'an

You all know that Allah, The Blessed and Mighty, chose Muhammad (SAW) as His Prophet and picked him to deliver the final message. The Qur'an was revealed to him and commanded him to obey all what He had ordered him to do, that is, to expound His message to the people. Allah says, ***We have revealed to you the Reminder (The Qur'an) to expound to people what was revealed to them*** (16:44). I think that the declaration mentioned in the verse contains two orders:

1. Declaration of the word and its arrangement. It is the communication of the Qur'an and its non-concealment, and its pursuit to Mankind just as Allah, The Blessed Almighty, has revealed to the heart of the Prophet (SAW) which is the intent of His saying ***O Messenger proclaim what is revealed to you from your Lord*** (5:67). Sayyida Ayesha (may Allah be pleased with her) is reported to have said "Whosoever says that Muhammad (SAW) concealed something which he was commanded to communicate, is is a great calumny against Allah." Then she read the abovementioned verse. (Bukhari and Muslim have stated it.) And according to the narration of Muslim: "If the Messenger of Allah (SAW) had concealed something which he was commanded to communicate, he would have concealed the saying of The Almighty ***Behold thou didst say to one who had received the grace of Allah and thy favour: Keep your wife to yourself and fear Allah. But thou didst hide in thy heart that which Allah was about to make manifest; you did fear the people, whereas Allah had a better right that you should fear Him*** (33:37).
2. The explanation of the meaning of the word or sentence or verse for which man needs an explanation, most of which bear reference to 'Mujmal' (comprehensive) verses or 'Amah' (general) verses or 'Mutlaq' (unbounded) verses. Then comes the Sunnah and clarifies the sentences and specifies the verses called 'Amah' and defines what is 'mutlaq' that is, in refernce to the saying (Qaul) of The Prophet (SAW), his deed (Fi'l) and the act he confirmed (Iqrar).

The Necessity of Sunnah to Understand

The Qur'an and Parables on that...

Allah says:***The male thief and female theif cutt of their hands*** (5:38) is a fitting example of that. The thief in it is general like the hand.

The oral tradition explains the first of them and restricts it by 'as-sareq' (the thief) who steals something worth a fourth of a Dinar**(2)** according to the saying of the Prophet (SAW) **There is no cutting - of the hand - unless the thing stolen is worth a fourth of a Dinar or more** (Buhkari & Muslim) the two shaikhs have recorded this Hadeeth. Again, the other is explained by the action of the Prophet (SAW) or the action of his companions and his confirmation. They used to cut the hand of the thief from the wrist as is known in the work

of Hadeeth. The oral tradition explains the hand mentioned in the verse on Tayammum (dust ablution) ***And rub therewith your faces and hands*** (5:6) is also the palm of the hand as is stated in a Hadeeth **Tayammum is the wiping of the face and the hands** recorded by the two shaikhs and Ahmad and others from a tradition reported by Ammar bin Yasir (may Allah be pleased with them). There are other verses that cannot be completely understood except through Sunnah. They are:

1. ***It is whose who believe and confuse not their beliefs with wrong,'dhulm'that are(truly) in security for they are on(right) guidance*** (6:82). The companions of the Prophet (SAW) understood the word 'dhulm' in its general sense to mean every wrong doing, even if it be little. On this account the verse is regarded as dubious and they said, "O Messenger of Allah, which of us did not involve his faith with obscurity?" He (SAW) said; **It is not that. It is only the 'shirk'(3). Have you not heard what Luqman said:** ***Verily Shirk is a very great sin (dhulm)*** (31:13). The two shaikhs have recorded it with others.
2. Allah says: ***When you travel on earth, there is no blame on you to shorten your prayer, for fear the unbelievers will persecute you*** (4:101). It is obvious from this verse that fear is a pre-requisite for the shortening of prayers. Some of the Prophet's companions asked him: "Why do we shorten our prayers while we feel safe?" He said: **It is a charity from Allah, so accept it** (Muslim).
3. Allah says: ***The carcass and it's blood are forbidden to you*** (5:3). In explanation of this verse, the corpse of locusts, fish, the livers, spleen of blood are lawful. So the Prophet (SAW) said: **He has made two dead things and blood lawful: the locusts and the fish, the liver and the spleen**. Baihaqi and others have recorded it as 'marfu' type of hadeeth as also 'mauquf' type. The 'isnad' od 'mauquf' is authentic and it is as good as 'marfu' tradition, since it is not stated in the form of a 'ra'y' (decision based on one individual's judgement not on Qur'an and Sunnah).
4. Allah says: ***I find not in the message received by me by inspiration any (food) forbidden to be taken by one who wishes to, unless it is dead meat or blood poured forth or the flesh of swine, for it is an abomination, or what is impious (meat) on which a name has been invoked other thatn Allah's*** (6:145). The Sunnah has forbidden many things not mentioned in the verse mentioned above, as for example in the saying of the Holy Prophet (SAW): **All predatory animals with tusk and every bird with claw are forbidden for consumption**. There are other traditions which have forbidden the consumption of such animals as the Prophet (SAW) is reported to have said on the Day of

   Khayber: **Allah and His Messenger have prohibited the consumption of domesticated asses, for they are filth**. The two shaikhs have reported it.
5. Allah says: ***Who has forbidden the adornment of Allah which He has produced for His servants, and the things clean and pure (which he has provided for sustenance)*** (7:32). The Sunnah, too, has forbidden some adornments, and this is evident from the Prophet (SAW) who is reported to have met some of his companions, and had a silk garment in one hand, and gold in the other, and said: **These are prohibited to Muslim males, lawful to females**. The hadeeths in their interpretation are many and well known in both the authentic collections of hadeeths, and others and the like of many examples well known to scholars familiar with

hadeeth and Islamic Jurispudence.

From what has been stated above, O Muslim Brethren, you can see the importance attached to Sunnah in Islamic Law. When we divert our intention again to the exaples mentioned beside others not mentioned, we are certain that there is no way to understand the Qur'an correctly except in association with the interpretation of the Sunnah. In the first example, the understanding of the 'sahabah' of 'dhulm' mentioned in the verse is on its general sense, despite the fact that the (Allah be pleased with them) were, as stated by Ibn Mas'ud: "The best of this community, most pious, profound in learning, least of dissimulation." Yet with all that they erred in their understanding of that. Were it not for the Prophet (SAW), who held them back from their mistaken notion, and made them take the step in the right direction in that the correct meaning of 'dhulm' in the context is shirk (association of partnership with Allah), we too would have followed in their wrong thinking. Allah, The Blessed and The Most High saved us from that wrong notion by the grace of the right direction of the Prophet (SAW) and his Sunnah. In the second example - with Allah's guidance - if not for the hadeeth mentioned above, we would have been in doubt at least with regard to the shortening of prayer (qasr-as-salat) during a journey while secure - if we did stipulate the condition of fear as obvious in the verse - till the companions saw the Prophet (SAW) shorten the prayers when it was safe and secure. In the third example, if not for the hadeeth, we would have forbidden ourselves the consumption of good things made lawful to us: locusts, fish, liver, and the spleen. In the fourth example, if not for the hadeeths, some of which we have mentioned, we would have considered lawful what Allah has made unlawful through the dictum of the holy Prophet (SAW) like predatory animals, and the birds which have claws. And so in the fifth example, if not for the hadeeths in regard to this question, we would have considered lawful what Allah prohibited through the words of His Prophet (SAW) like gold and silk. It is for this, some forbearers (as-salaf) say that 'Sunnah' pronounces judgement of The Book (al-Qur'an).

The Deviation of Those Who are Satisfied with The Qur'an to the Exclusion of Hadeeth

It is a matter of regret that according to the interpretation found in the works of some commentators and moders authors, that it is permissible to do what is stated in the last two examples: Consumption of the predatory animals and the waearing of gold and silk by referring their interpretation only to the Qur'an. Today, a sect exists called "Quranites" who comment according to their whims and fancies; without seeking the explanation of the authentic Sunnah. They only accept and follow the Sunnah which suit their desires, the rest they throw behind. The Prophet (SAW) is reported to have said that: **None of you reclines on his bed, the order comes to him on an affair which I am commanded to do or not to do. He says: "I don't know, what is found in The Book of Allah we follow"** (Tirmidhi). According to another report: **What is found in The Book of Allah as 'Haram,' we pronounce it 'haram' (forbidden). Surely, I am given The Qur'an and its example with it.** Yet, according to another report: **What the Messenger**

of Allah has forbidden, Allah has prohibited it. It is a matter of regret that one renowned scholar has written a book on Islamic law and its dogma, and in its preface, he says that he has written it and that he has made reference only to The Qur'an. This true hadeeth gives positive evidence that the divine law of Islam - As-Shari'ah - is not merely Qur'an, but Qur'an and Sunnah. Therefore, whoever holds fast to one source for reference to the exclusion of the other, he held fast to neither of them, since both complement each other. The Qur'an says ***Whoever obeys the Messenger, obeys Allah. Allah says, No, by your Lord they do not believe until they submit to your adjucation in all disputes between them, then they do not find themselves oppressed with your decisions and they completely submit*** (4:65). Again, Allah says ***When a matter has been decided by Allah and His Messenger, it does not behove a believer, man or woman, to have choice in their matter. One who disobeys Allah and His Messenger, he is indeed on a clearly wrong Path*** (33:36). Furthermore, Allah says ***What the Messenger teaches you, take it, and what he forbids you, avoid doing it*** (59:7).

In connection with this verse, I am marvelled by what is corroborated by Ibn Mas'ud (Allah be pleased with him) that is, a woman came to him and told him, "You who says: May Allah's curse be on 'Al-Namisat' and 'Al-Motanamisat'**(4)** and those who tattoo." He said "Yes." She said, "I read the Book of Allah (Al-Qur'an) from beginning to its end. I did not find what you have said. He told her, "If you have read it, you would have found it. As for your reading what the Messenger teaches you, take it, and what he forbids you, avoid doing it." She said, "Certainly." He said, "I have heard the Messenger of Allah (SAW) say **May Allah's Curse be on the Al-Namisat**." (Bukhari and Muslim)

Inadequacy of Philology to understand The Qur'an

From what has been stated above, it is clear that there is no scope for anyone with all his Arabic Scholarship to understand the glorious Qur'an, without the help of the Sunnah of the Prophet (SAW), his sayings and actions. The companions of the Prophet (SAW) were the most knowledgeable in the language, which The Qur'an was revealed in, when it was not blemished by the incorrectness of the common folks knowledge or their grammatical mistakes. Yet, they erred in understanding the verses quoted above when they relied on language alone.

It is self-evident that a man well-informed of the Sunnah is more appropriate to understand The Qur'an and deduce the rules from it than one who is ignorant of it. How can it be a source to one who does not reckon it and does not make reference to it?

For this reason, it is part of the rules agreed upon that Qur'an should be interpreted by the Qur'an itself as welll as the Sunnah, then by the sayings of the Sahabah... etc. **(5)** It is here that the cause of deviation of scholastic theologians (Ahlul-Kalam) become clear, both ancient and modern, and their opposition to the forbears 'As-salaf' (May Allah be pleased with them) in their doctrines not to speak of their laws. They are far from Sunnah, and knowledge of it, and rely on their intelligence and desires to decide on the verses of attributes and others. What is best is what was written down in the exposition of Tahawi's doctrine (page 212 Fourth Edition): When one is not well-informed of The Book and Sunnah, what would he say about the Fundamentals of Religion (usoolud-deen)? He only

receives the assertion of someone. If he says that he takes it from The Book of Allah, he does not study the commentary of The Qur'an on the basis of prophetic traditions, and reflects over it, nor what the companions (Sahabah), and the following generations narrated, which is transmitted to us from the authorities whom the critics chose. They have not transmitted the system and arrangement of The Qur'an, but its poetic expression and meaning. They did not learn the Qur'an like children, but studied it with meaning. One who does not follow in their footsteps, speaks on his own accord. One who does that thinks it be the religion of Allah, and does not study The Book of Allah, he sins, even if he is right. One who studies The Qur'an and The Sunnah, he is rewarded, even if he goes wrong, but if he is right in his opinion, his reward is doubled. Then he says: What is obligatory, is submission to the Messenger (SAW) carrying out his saying and accepting his saying with satisfaction and belief without contradicting it with false ideas called 'opprehensive faculty' (Ma'qul) bearing doubt or complaint, or offering the opinions of men and the garbage of their intellect. We unite with The Prophet (SAW) in judgement, submission, obedience and compliance, just as we have unison with Allah, glory be to Him, by worshipping Him by humility, submissiveness, repentance and reliance. In short, what is obligatory on all MUslims is that they do not separate between Qur'an and Sunnah; whereas, it is obligatory to take both of them and to formulate the law on both of them. This is a safeguard for them, so that they won't fall right or left; and that they won't fall back in error as explained by The Prophet (SAW): I leave behind me two things. You will never go astray if you hold fast to them: The Qur'an and my Sunnah.

CAUTION

It is self-evident after this that I say: The Sunnah which has an important bearing on Islamic Law is only the Sunnah confirmed by scientific channels, and authentic chains of narrations known to the learned in regard to hadeeths and the background of the narrators. It is not the one which is found in different works of Tafseers (commentaries of The Qur'an) and Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), and in different writings of longing, intimidation, advices, and admonitions, etc...

They contain weak, spurious, and fabricated hadeeths, of which Islam absolves, like the story of 'Harut and Marut,' and the sotry of 'gharanik.' I have a special letter which makes it void and it is printed**(6)**. A major part of it is recorded in two huge books namely "A chain of weak and fabricated hadeeths and their evil impact on the community." Their number upto date have reached approximately four thousand hadeeths**(7)**. It is obligatory on the learned, especially those who spread the knowledge of fiqh and legal opinions among the public, that they shouldn't dare to argue with hadeeth unless it is well-attested. Books of jurisprudence, which they refer to, are normally filled with traditions which are not well-attested, nor have any bases, as is well-known to the learned. I have begun an important project, and I think it will be of use to those occupied with jurisprudence, and I will name it: "Weak and Fabricated Hadeeths in the Major Jurisprudence 'fiqh' Books," by which I mean:

1. Al-Hidayah, by Al-Marghinani, in Hanafi fiqh,
2. Al-Modawwanah, by Ibnil-Qasim, in Maliki fiqh,
3. Sharhul-wajeez, by Al-rafiee, in Shafiee fiqh,

4. Al-Mughni, by Ibn Quddamah, in Hanbali fiqh, and
5. Bidayatul Mujtahid, by Ibn Rushd-al-Andalusi, in comparative fiqh.

I regret that I did not get the opportunity to finish it, because the journal "Al-Wa'e-al-Islami" of Kuwait which promised to publish it, when perused it, didn't print it. Although I missed this opportunity, perhaps I will succeed on another occasion, Allah willing, to offer to my bretheren occupied with jurisprudence a precise learned course to help them to facilitate their knowledge of the different categories of hadeeth with reference to various sources from books on hadeeth, with an explanation of its special nature and character and reliance on them. Allah is the source of success.

Weakness of Hadeeth of Muadh in the opinion And its disapproval

Before I conclude my talk, I think I must direct the attention of brethren present to a well known hadeeth. It is devoid of one of the books of jurisprudence on account of its weakness in respect of its chain of narration (isnad) and its contrdiction with what we have concluded in this talk, regarding the illegitimacy of discrimination in law between The Qur'an and Sunnah; and the necessity of taking both. It is a hadeeth of Muadh bin Jabal (May Allah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (SAW) said to him when he sent hin to Yaman: **By what source will you decide?** He said, "By the book of Allah." He then asked, **If you don't find any guidline?** He said, "I will make an effort to form my own opinion." He said, **Praise be to Allah who makes success the effort of the envoy of the Messenger of Allah, to what The Prophet likes.**

As for the weakness of its 'isnad,' there is no scope for its explanation now. But I have explained it clearly in the above mentioned chain**(8)**. It would suffice now to mention that the Commander of the Believers in the hadeeth 'Imam Al-Bukhari' (may Allah have mercy on him) says that the hadeeth is not recognized (munkar). After this I am permitted to begin to explain the conflict which I pointed.

The tradition of Muadh gives the ruler a method of three stages which does not permit to search for any rule with regard to 'Ra'e' (personal opinion) except that he does not find it in the Sunnah, nor in the Sunnah, except that after he does not find it in The Qur'an. It is in relation to 'Ra'e' a genuine method with all the learned (ulama), so that they say, "Where there is a tradition relating the deeds and utterances of The Prophet (SAW), personal opinion is void." But in relation to Sunnah, it is not true, because Sunnah dictates The Qur'an and and clarifies its doctrines. It is then essential to search for a ruling in Sunnah, even if he thinks it is found in The Qur'an as we have mentioned it.

Sunnah is not with The Qur'an in the same manner as 'Ar-Ra'e' with the Sunnah. No, definitely not. It is rather necessary to regard the Qur'an and Sunnah as being one source with no discrimination between the two whatsoever. This is indicatied in a saying of the Prophet (SAW): **Certainly I have come with The Qur'an and its like (meaning the Sunnah)**. He said **They are never separated until they come to the Basin(9)**. The compilation mentioned between them is not correct because the separation between them is void as we have explained. This is what I wish to draw attention to. If I am right, it is from Allah; if wrong, it is from me. I ask Allah Almighty to protect us and you from errors and from all that displeases him. I conclude my praising by "Al-Hamdu-lillahi rabbil-alameen" - Praise be to Allah, The Lord of the Worlds.

Footnotes

1. **i.e.**: There is nothing worthy of worship except Allah - who really deserves to be worshipped by Mankind

2. ***Dinar***: A form of currency

3. ***Shirk*** is to disbelieve in the oneness of Allah, or to offer any form of worship to other than Allah.

4. ***Namisah***: a woman who plucks hers or others eyebrows - to be a thin line - to seek beauty. Such an act is forbidden. It is a means to change the form of Allah's creation. Motanamisah: a woman who asks others to do it for her.

5. This states other than what is known by many of the learned: to comment on The Qur'an itself if there is not any Sunnah, then by the Sunnah. This will be explained in at then end of this treatise on the hadeeth of Muadh bin Jabal - may Allah be pleased with him.

6. Its title is "Pitch of majaniq to demolish the story of gharaniq" printed by Al-Maktabul-e-Islami Story of gharaniq: is a fabricated story found in some commentaries, claiming that a verse in The Qur'an acknowledged the polytheists in their beliefs.

7. The number at present [1394 A.H.] has exceeded five thousand and may Allah make easy its publication in the near future. So far only five hundred have broken into print.

8. No. 885 of the chain mentioned, and we hope that the volume which includes it will be published shortly, 'insha Allah.'

9. i.e. until the Day of Judgement